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TAGS: ASEC CASC PGOV VE

SUBJECT: HIGH CRIME EFFECTS VOTERS BUT SPARES CANDIDATES

Classified By: Francisco Fernandez, Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(d)

**¶11.** (SBU) Venezuela's spiraling crime has resulted in weekends with a homicide every hour in Caracas and earned the nation the unflattering title of violent crime capital of the world. Recent polling by Alfredo Keller showed 78% of respondents thought crime was worse this year and 67% opined that drug trafficking had also gotten worse. Paradoxically, such crippling statistics have not been laid at the feet of Chavez and his Bolivarian revolution, nor has the fractured opposition made much of an election issue over law and order.

#### TEFLON AND FATALISM

**¶12.** (C) Crime has been a constant specter over the lives of Caraquenos since the oil boom of the 1970s when consulting experts from Scotland Yard had their wallets lifted before leaving Maiquetia airport. According to Luis Cedeno of the crime NGO INCOSEC, (protect throughout) 1999 penal code reform that released 12,000 criminals with no supervisory program and the increased availability of firearms due to the rise of narco-trafficking in Venezuela has created a lethal combination. As in other countries, crime and particularly violent crime, falls disproportionately on the poor. In Venezuela this has created a sense of fatalism among Chavez' electoral base that crime is part of their "lot in life." Interestingly, culpability does not stick to the charismatic Chavez; instead, his supporters blame the aides and appointees who "don't carry out his instructions". Minister of Interior and Justice Ramon Rodriguez Chacin who was sacked in August after regularly extolling falling crime statistics as headlines , in contrast, tallied record body counts. Ironically, former Interior and Justice Minister and PSUV Sucre borough candidate Jesse Chacon is claiming he reduced crime by over 60 percent during his tenure.

#### GORDIAN KNOT

**¶13.** (SBU) Candidates in Venezuela don't run for office on law and order campaigns since crime is seen as an intractable problem. In fact, few even make security a plank in their platforms. Crime and security require coordinated efforts and an effective judiciary. Governors have scant ability to raise funds and rely on money from the central government. Local mayors are able to raise revenue to fund more or better equipped police forces. However, given that most major Venezuelan cities are made up of multiple municipalities and crime is highly mobile efforts by one mayor can't contain neighboring criminal gangs. Since criminal courts have a conviction rate of less than 8%, most arrests do not translate into convictions.

**¶14.** (C) COMMENT: Although foremost in Venezuelan's consciousness, crime has not been an effective political tool

to propel a candidate into office. If opposition parties do increase their representation in elected offices and newly elected mayors can maintain enough unity to coordinate a police strategy, the results might make fighting crime an effective political platform in three or four years.

Conversely, if newly elected opposition governors and mayors are unable to combat crime, unlike Venezuela's president, they may be blamed by voters in the next election.

End Comment.

CAULFIELD